



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## EDMUND BURKE AND HIS ABIDING INFLUENCE.

BY J. O'CONNOR POWER.

---

THE year which marks the centenary of the death of Edmund Burke finds his authority among political students higher, perhaps, than it ever stood before. In an age which was prolific of great statesmen he was pre-eminent as a statesman. The place which he occupied is sufficiently indicated by his contemporaries. Dr. Johnson said that Burke was "first in the House of Commons, because he was first everywhere," an opinion shared, I have no doubt, by all the members of the Literary Club—Sir Joshua Reynolds, Garrick, Goldsmith, and the rest. Mackintosh, in reference to a comparison between Burke and Gibbon, went so far as to say that the historian of the Roman Empire might have been "stolen out of a corner of Burke's mind without being missed." Wyndham referred to him as the man of all men then living whom he most revered. Fox's tribute to him has become classical. "If," said he, "all the political information I have learned from books, all which I have gained from science, and all which my knowledge of the world and its affairs has taught me, were put into one scale, and the improvement which I have derived from my right honorable friend's instruction and conversation were placed in the other, I should be at a loss to decide to which to give the preference. I have learned more from my right honorable friend than from all the men with whom I ever conversed." Pitt's sense of his public services may be gathered from the handsome provision which he contemplated making for Burke's last years, and which included a peerage and a suitable pension; and Canning, in announcing his death, said it was "an event for the world." Testimony of this description might be multiplied; but if we had not a scrap of it, if Burke had wholly failed to gain the appreciation of his own age; if, on the con-

trary, he had gone down to the grave under the curses and calumnies of those whom he loved and served—a fate which has more than once befallen geniuses misrepresented and misunderstood—the student needs only to make the acquaintance of his works to discover that he was the greatest of the political philosophers, and that the product of his massive intellect is an imperishable part of a great literature.

To complain that Burke is not more widely read would be as unreasonable as to complain that the readers of Shakespeare, or of Milton, or of Bacon, are not more numerous. The measure of the popularity of great authors, such as these, is the measure of the intellectual culture of the time. They will be most popular in whatever age the highest art, the largest knowledge, the ripest wisdom, and the broadest humanity, as embodied in literature, are most appreciated. Burke's themes are too great and his treatment of them too profound for the understanding of persons of limited views and narrow sympathies. Many, however, who do not read him pay him the homage of liberal quotation, and probably not a single day passes that the stores of his wisdom are not drawn upon by some writer or speaker, eager to appropriate his ideas if not always willing to acknowledge their source. The subjects upon which his mind was engaged can never lose their human interest, for they are bound up with the constitution of civil society, the mysteries of law and order, of religion and civilization, the struggles of liberty and authority, and the conflicts of rights and duties, embracing, in a word, the whole domain of social controversy, with all its tragic passion and wrestling aspiration. The mere enumeration of them enables one to realize the mental range of Burke, and his extraordinary power, which dazzled his own age, and which, after the lapse of a hundred years, provokes the wonder and admiration of posterity.

His influence on public affairs extended, in his own lifetime, to all parts of the British Empire, and to Europe, in the momentous period of the French Revolution. If we take note of the principles which he sought to enforce in Ireland, in America, and in India, we shall be able to form some idea of the character of his work as a Member of Parliament. With regard to Ireland: He had mastered all her problems, and his devotion to her interests cost him a distinction which he greatly prized—the representation of the ancient city of Bristol. On the national ques-

tion Burke was opposed to separation, but in favor of legislative independence. He held that "a natural and cheerful alliance is a more secure link of connection than subordination borne with grudging and discontent." On the religious question he was on the side of equal civil rights for all denominations; and on the commercial question he was for free trade, which, in his time, meant the right of Ireland to trade with the colonies on the same footing as Great Britain, and to enjoy full reciprocity with Great Britain herself. It was in connection with the two last questions that Burke came into conflict with a section of his constituents. He had voted for the removal of restrictions on Irish trade, and for a slight modification of the disabling laws against Catholics. His vindication of himself before the electors of Bristol forms a noble episode in a noble career. I doubt whether Burke's moral grandeur was ever more conspicuous than it was in this hour of a glorious personal defeat. Not when he sought to maintain the rights of the American colonies against unjust taxation; nor when he denounced the corruption, cruelty, and tyranny of the East India Company; nor when, speaking as the oracle of Europe, he uttered prophetic warnings against the crimes of the French Revolution. Here are the words of dignity, power, and eloquence in which he concluded what proved, alas! a vain appeal to the constituency of that day:

"And now, gentlemen, on this serious day, when I come, as it were, to make up my account with you, let me take to myself some degree of honest pride on the nature of the charges that are against me. I do not here stand before you accused of venality or of neglect of duty. It is not said that in the long period of my service I have in a single instance sacrificed the slightest of your interests to my ambition or to my fortune. It is not alleged that, to gratify any anger or revenge of my own or of my party, I have had a share in wronging or oppressing any description of men or any one man in any description. No! the charges against me are all of one kind—that I have pushed the principles of general justice and benevolence too far; farther than a cautious policy would warrant, and farther than the opinions of many would go along with me. In every accident which may happen through life—in pain, in sorrow, in depression—I will call to mind this accusation and be comforted."

I do not suppose that Burke was troubled by the distracting claims of a dual allegiance—to England as the sphere of his duty, and to Ireland as the place of his birth. In this very Bristol speech he raises the point himself, and disposes of it effectually by declaring that he was an American in the affairs of America

as much as he was an Irishman in the affairs of Ireland. We may infer from his sympathy with America and with India, that his devotion to Irish interests was the effect of his principles and not of his nationality. He would have voted, I believe, for the relief of Irish trade and the emancipation of the Catholics if he had not had a drop of Irish blood in his veins.

The electors of Bristol could not affect any surprise at the independent spirit of their member, for when he first solicited their suffrages, six years before, he had claimed the exercise of an independent judgment as an inalienable personal right. His colleague on that occasion opened the subject of the relations between a member of Parliament and his constituents, and declared that he should regard the instructions of the people of Bristol as binding. Burke, as Mr. John Morley observes, "upheld a manlier doctrine." The passage is indelibly engraved upon my memory, and I confess that I have never ceased to feel the influence it exercised upon me when I first read it many years ago, at the time of my own election to Parliament. Burke said :

"It ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him, their opinions high respect, their business unremitted attention. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasure, his satisfactions to theirs, and, above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own. But his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living."

Burke, as he said of himself, "was not swaddled and rocked and dandled into a legislator," and his power to serve the commonwealth was inseparable from the independence to which his abilities entitled him, and which he so manfully claimed.

His speeches on America entitle their author to be regarded as the greatest of imperial statesmen. They are brimful of the highest maxims of good government and of the soundest rules of policy, and the whole history of the colonies since his time makes it as clear as the light of day that the separation of America was largely due to the rejection of his counsels, and to the proud and stupid obstinacy with which the dominant party in Great Britain sought to govern the expatriated of their own race on principles incompatible with freedom. Foresight is an unfail-

ing characteristic of a true statesman, and surely no public man ever possessed that quality in a higher degree than Edmund Burke. It is astonishing, when we look back to-day, from the tranquil standpoint of a long retrospect, on all that occurred during the struggle with America, with what unerring precision he foretold the consequences of a mistaken policy. His foresight was justified not only in the general result, but in every particular. What, in one sentence, was the grievance of America? It was that she was taxed without her consent, by a Parliament in which she was not represented. What, in a word, was Burke's remedy? It was to allow the Americans to tax themselves, and to give or withhold supplies according to their own sense of their obligations to the empire. This was the old principle of the British Constitution, and which had been tried successfully in these very colonies. Burke protested against the Revenue Act of 1764, and the Stamp Act of the following year, as innovations upon the old practice of the Constitution. He showed that the right to determine the mode and character of supply was a central principle of British liberty. "On this point of taxes," he urged, "the ablest pens and most eloquent tongues have been exercised; the greatest spirits have acted and suffered." He traced the descent of the colonists to show that they were hereditary lovers of freedom. He argued from their temper and character, from their history, religion and education, from the practice of their free local assemblies, that the colonists were "not only devoted to liberty, but to liberty according to English ideas and on English principles;" and thence by an unbroken chain of reasoning, of illustration, of multiplied precedents and accumulated experience, he deduced the conclusion that, while they could be conciliated into loyalty, they could not be coerced into servitude. Lord North and Grenville and their majority, on the other hand, were simple enough to imagine that among British colonists British rule could survive the abrogation of the British Constitution. They persisted in treating the question of America as a question of constitutional law merely; Burke dealt with it as a great question of state policy, and the principles he laid down were not the less constitutional because they were more politic and practical and humane than those of the majority. "The question with me," he said, "is not whether you have a right to render your people

miserable, but whether it is not your interest to make them happy. It is not what a lawyer tells me I may do, but what humanity, reason, and justice tell me I ought to do. I am not determining a point of law; I am restoring tranquillity, and the general character and situation of a people must determine what sort of government is fitted for them." . . . "Nobody shall persuade me, when a whole people are concerned, that acts of lenity are not means of conciliation." . . . "I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people." These are sentences which will outlast many constitutions, and, like so much of what Burke said, they bear the double character of being strictly applicable to the matter in hand, and also worthy to rank as permanent additions to the wisdom of politics.

The separation of the American colonies was a lesson which one would have thought could not be lost on the rulers of the empire, but the pride of domination survived even that disaster, and for a full half century afterward England continued in Canada, in another form, the experiment which had so disgracefully failed in the other American colonies. Canada, without constitutional government, was in rebellion when the Queen ascended the throne. It is now reputed to be one of the most loyal parts of the empire; and I shall not soon forget the effect produced by the present Prime Minister of the Dominion when, addressing a London audience composed mainly of Englishmen in this jubilee year, he declared, pointing to a flag which had waved over the Canadian rebels sixty years ago:—"We are loyal because we are free." When I heard that manly utterance I was reminded of Edmund Burke, and I could not help thinking that he had not lived in vain, nor help rejoicing that throughout the British empire his principles of colonial government universally prevail.

The mere thought of Burke's prolonged fight and herculean labors on behalf of the oppressed peoples and princes of India, is almost enough to strike a speaker dumb and to cause the pen that would portray them to drop from the hand. I confess that if I were asked suddenly, and without any previous warning, to describe my impression of Burke at this period of his splendid career, I should be unable to utter a word without a great effort. I should plead for time to adjust my memory and collect my ideas. Then, perhaps, the image of the great statesman, and his

magnificent cause, would slowly rise before me. I should behold him at the outset of that gallant struggle, which he waged for twenty long years, devoting himself to the education of his party and the instruction of Great Britain ; entering, without rank or wealth or hereditary prestige—the three great instruments of political power in his day—upon a contest in which these were all arrayed against him, in order to bring relief to the unrepresented millions of a remote dependency. I should see him putting on the armor of truth and justice and humanity, to do battle with colossal oppression, and to overthrow a system which was supported by robbery, torture, and murder, and by crimes even worse than these.

During many years he champions the cause of India in the House of Commons, and is instrumental in carrying measures designed to mitigate, at least, the severity of her rulers. In that interval he has explored the annals of the nations of India back to the first glimmerings of the dawn of history. Their religions, superstitions, literatures, manners and customs, industrial and social conditions, have occupied his thoughts, and dwelt in his profoundest meditations. Again and again he appeals to Parliament to rescue India and save the honor of Great Britain, till at last the Commons resolve upon the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the foremost of the tyrants and oppressors whom he has arraigned. We follow him to Westminster Hall, and the Court of Britain's Peers, where, with Sheridan at his side, he opens the greatest trial of all time, before the most powerful of human tribunals. We take our seats in the old hall, and accompany him through every stage of an indictment which gradually unfolds the story of Hastings' crimes and India's degradation. We hear of a British Governor exercising not merely arbitrary power, but arbitrary power accompanied by the open encouragement of notorious criminals and the persecution of innocent men ; of widows and orphans, of princely families, suddenly robbed of their wealth, and obliged to beg the necessities of life from the servants of their despoilers ; of women and children hunted and outraged by a licentious soldiery ; of whole nations being sold to the highest bidder, and resold over the heads of the recreant purchasers, to supply the coffers of a British company ; of treaties made only for purposes of deception and fraud, and we hear the tones of indignation in which the defender of



afflicted peoples declares : " I impeach Warren Hastings of high crimes and misdemeanors ; I impeach him in the name of the Commons of Great Britain, whose parliamentary trust he has abused ; whose national character he has dishonored ; I impeach him in the name of the people of India, whose properties he has destroyed, whose country he has laid waste and desolate ; I impeach him in the name of human nature itself, which he has cruelly outraged, injured and oppressed in both sexes. And I impeach him in the name and by the virtue of those eternal laws of justice, which ought equally to pervade every age, rank, condition, and situation in the world." Then, remembering all that the orator has to contend with and all that depends upon the issue, we surrender our judgment, affections, and emotions to his absolute control, and feel that we are overwhelmed, not by speech alone, however eloquent and transcendent, but by the resistless moral force of heroic action.

Though Burke never attained high office, his abilities were so versatile as to qualify him for any post which a cabinet minister could fill. His practical wisdom was as conspicuous as his power of generalization. No one had a clearer comprehension or a firmer grasp of great principles of universal application ; at the same time his policy in every department of English politics rested on a wide and solid basis of information and experience. He was steeped in the history of the past, yet penetrated through and through with the reality of the present, and ever and always mindful of that future in which the speculations and measures of the day were to be tested, and finally approved or condemned. His prodigious activity in public affairs sprang not from an intellectual source alone, nor from his imperial patriotism ; it was constantly fed from an inexhaustible store of moral energy. He was animated by a detestation of all forms of oppression, whether by kings or governors, parliaments or peoples, which was in him a consuming passion, from which his noble nature could only obtain relief by denunciation of the oppressor and the destruction of his power. I cannot help thinking that Burke must have been stimulated, too, and sustained by delight in his studies and in his work. It is impossible, without counting this as an additional incentive, to understand the amazing industry which he devoted to the elucidation of all the great questions dealt with in his speeches and writings. How his method reproves the habit, too

common in our day, as in other days, of debating subjects affecting the fate of millions of our fellow-creatures as if they could be disposed of by echoing the chatter of ignorance, or prejudice, or vanity, or self-interest. When we read Burke's speech on Fox's East India Bill we say, What a great pro-consul he would have made ! When we read his speech on conciliation with America we feel that the greatest of colonial ministers was lost in him ; and when we read his speech on Economical Reform we exclaim, Here is an ideal Chancellor of the Exchequer !

Let me dwell for a moment on the last-named of these, for it throws a vivid light on Burke's attitude towards popular government. The object of his plan of administrative or economical reform was to cut off the sources of corruption which sapped the independence of the House of Commons, by the abolition of certain offices, and the application of the emoluments connected with them to the public service. Burke did not believe in popular government such as, in this day of democratic suffrages, exists in all constitutionally governed countries. His idea of what good government required was not the enlargement of the constituencies but the purification of the representation. Doubtless, he was right at the time ; but if the idea were to be laid down as a settled principle it would be necessary to point out that nothing is so fatal to corruption as publicity and discussion, and that wide franchise promotes both. I cannot believe that Burke would be satisfied with the doctrine that, in the sphere of government, everything should be done *for* the people, but nothing *by* the people. He had more faith, I apprehend, in the formative influence of self-government than such a doctrine implies. The doctrine is, nevertheless, one which in our own day has many able upholders, and I remember reading a speech of Charles Dickens's in which he announced it as the fruit of all his study and observation in politics. "Everything for the people" is at all events a sounder maxim than "everything for a class," or "everything for the rulers," and in its way it marks a stage in the progress of political science and social responsibility. It may be that Burke could no more conceive a perfect state with manhood suffrage, than Plato could conceive one without slavery.

In the *Reflections on the French Revolution* he advances and supports, by the authority of Aristotle, the dictum that neither

an absolute democracy nor an absolute monarchy is a legitimate form of government. But in the same place he says wisely: "I reprobate no form of government merely upon abstract principles." The attempt made by the French, at the time of his writing, to establish a pure democracy on the Athenian model, he knew to be foredoomed to failure, and all theoretical constitution-making excited his contempt.

The most vulnerable part of Burke's work is undoubtedly his essay on the French Revolution. Students who read it for instruction should also read Sir James Mackintosh and Tom Paine on the other side, not forgetting, however, that Mackintosh called on Burke, when lapse of years had confirmed many of the views and predictions of the latter, to recant what he had written. I have never heard of Tom Paine's recanting anything on any subject. It is, perhaps, vain to hope that the time may come when the *Reflections* will cease to be criticised as a party pamphlet, loudly praised by one party and bitterly censured by the other. One can understand and forgive the violence with which it was assailed on its publication, and as Burke's own language degenerated into violence, it was natural that he should be answered after his own manner. But one-sided criticism of the essay seems to me to be out of place at the present day, and I think much of what Burke wrote would require to be eliminated altogether to make it a safe text-book for the out-and-out partisans of traditional authority. There is no want of power or of light in the *Reflections*, but it is often power without measure or restraint, and it is the light that dazzles, and not the light that makes things clear. We rise from the study of Burke's earlier work with the feeling that every argument he has used is justified by the strictest reasoning, by a logic which is absolutely unimpeachable. We feel that all his premises repose upon unquestionable facts; and if we are tempted at any time to suspect that his zeal is prompted by the interest of party, we are startled out of our distrust by some generous admission, some broad and manly sentiment or some bold and comprehensive generalization, which convinces us that the cause of the pleader and of truth are one. Our emotions are attuned to such noble feeling, our ears to such perfect utterance, and our judgment to appeals so fair and rational, that we are not prepared, when we take up the *Reflections*, to encounter the author in the rôle of an advocate,

who strains every point in order to prove his case. That Burke sank to the level of an advocate in this essay is undoubtedly true, but a mighty advocate, nevertheless, whose meteoric eloquence roused the attention and excited the passionate interest of the civilized world.

If the partisans of absolute authority have no right to appropriate the work, the friends of constitutional liberty would be unwise in discarding it. Indeed it is, in large measure, a plea for constitutional liberty against tyranny in any form. Burke admitted a right of revolution in an oppressed people, and was himself the eulogist of the English revolution of 1688; but with him the methods and the circumstances were all important; and he condemned, for the same reasons, the Cromwellian revolution of 1641 and the French Revolution of 1789. While approving what took place in England in 1688, he stoutly champions the principle of hereditary succession on the ground that, although there was a "temporary deviation" from the strict order in the person of King William, "it is against all genuine principles of jurisprudence to draw a principle from a law made in a special case and regarding an individual person." He rejected the doctrine that the crown is held by divine right, while maintaining hereditary succession as based on law and custom and good policy. He upheld an inheritable crown and an inheritable peerage, but he also maintained equally the liberties of the Commons and the franchises of the people, as an "entailed inheritance" and an indissoluble part of the British Constitution, and to the defence of their liberties the most arduous labors of his life were devoted. "A disposition to preserve and a desire to improve" was his definition of statesmanship. And both by temperament and reflection he was a genuine reformer.

"Far am I from denying in theory," he said, "full as far is my heart from withholding in practice (if I were of the power to give or withhold), the real rights of men. In denying their false claims of right I do not mean to injure those which are real and are such as their pretended rights would totally destroy. If civil society be made for the advantage of man, all the advantages for which it is made become his right. It is an institution of beneficence; and law itself is only beneficence acting by rule. Men have a right to live by that rule; they have a right to justice, as between their fellows, whether their fellows are in polite function or in ordinary occupation. They have a right to the fruits of their industry, and to the means of making their industry fruitful. They have a right to the acquisitions of their parents; to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring; to instruction in life, and to consolation in

death. Whatever each man can separately do, without trespassing upon others, he has a right to do for himself ; and he has a right to a fair portion of all which society, with all its combinations of skill and force, can do in his favor."

Because Burke broke away in the *Reflections* from the judicial self-restraint which usually characterized him we are apt to forget that, in that wonderful composition, he deviates again and again into his earlier and better manner, and rewards the persevering reader with passages of calm wisdom and solid, fruitful speculation. I have, I think, given an example of these in the passage I have just quoted, and a hundred such might be added. The truth is that although he allowed himself to be carried away by his sensibility, in contemplating some of the terrible incidents of the greatest event which has occurred in the secular history of man, he was swayed, in his main contention, by the convictions of a lifetime. The prudent student will not, therefore, put away that work, but examine it with even greater care than the others, in order to sift the gems from the dust in which they are imbedded, and thereby complete the measure of his acquisitions from the rich store which Edmund Burke has bequeathed to the literature of the world.

Burke's views of the French Revolution would have been greatly modified if he had taken his usual precaution to fully inform himself of all the essential facts before pronouncing judgment. That he had made inquiries, and had long pondered upon the condition of France, we have on his own assurance, and during his visit to that country in 1773 he foresaw the tendency of events which culminated in revolution sixteen years later. But not then, nor at any later period, did he realize that it was not the literary movement only that was undermining the old order, but also the intolerable sufferings of the tillers of the soil. In his defence of the French Monarchy he enters into an elaborate argument to show, by the increase which had taken place in the wealth and population of France, that the old government had not wholly failed in its duty. But the aggregate wealth of a nation and the growth of its population do not settle the question. These are quite consistent with grinding poverty among large masses of the people. To be satisfied that any nation is fairly prosperous, we want to know not only that the amount of the national income is considerable, but that the great body of

the people enjoy their proper share of that income. Nor is a high rate of wages any criterion, for everything depends upon the purchasing power of money. And the surest test of material prosperity is the facility with which food, clothing, and shelter may be obtained. As Adam Smith—a contemporary of Burke's—justly says, “accumulation makes a people rich, but distribution makes them happy.”

His last appearance in the House of Commons was on the 20th of June, 1794, when he replied to a vote of thanks passed by the House to himself and his fellow-managers of the impeachment of Hastings. He accepted the Chiltern Hundreds, and retired from Parliament, where he had sat for twenty-nine years. The remaining three years of his life were spent at Beaconsfield, where he died on the 9th of July, 1797, and where he sleeps in an unnamed grave. The injunctions of his will prevented his interment in Westminster Abbey, a circumstance which serves to illustrate the dignified humility which was not the least conspicuous trait in his character. To intellectual qualities, the exercise of which has made his name immortal, he united great good nature, and a readiness to help others. He had a keen appreciation of homely joys, and cherished the family affections so tenderly that the death of his only son is said to have broken the spirit which thirty years of political strife had been unable to bend.

His performances as a statesman were so various and far-reaching, and their influence has been so wide and so continuous, that it is yet too soon to fully estimate their worth. He vindicated with a clearness and force never equalled the principles of civil and religious liberty in all parts of the empire. He manifested a profound reverence for the sanctity of the individual conscience, whether he was dealing with the members of his own church in England or the Catholics of Ireland, or the dissenters of America, or the Mohammedans and Hindoos of India. He asserted the liberties of the colonies. He annexed morality to politics, and held states and governments, equally with private persons, amenable to its dictates. In him the British Constitution has found its ablest interpreter, and he has rendered it the inestimable service of fixing the conditions on which alone it can be preserved. Irishmen especially have reason to be proud that their country has sent forth a man who was not only a great statesman himself but the teacher of great statesmen, and one whose re-

corded word has, for more than a hundred years, been a fount of inspiration to those who succeeded him in the service of the state.

The average schoolboy may learn a lesson of hope from the circumstance that Burke was not distinguished at college. The serious student and the general reader will be interested to know his method of acquiring knowledge ; and, fortunately, we have it described in his own words. He took up one subject at a time and stuck to it at a white heat till he was satisfied. That is, I believe, the only method for any one who reads not merely for the occupation of the moment, but in order to get to the heart of the matter and form a judgment upon it that will stand the test of adverse criticism. The literary aspirant will note that he was in the habit of writing by dictation, which is an easy and pleasant habit when it is thoroughly acquired. A man who is full of his subject, and who writes by dictation, ought to be able to compose three times as fast as one who wields his own pen.

His literary quality has been described by critics without number, and when one who is not a critic, but a plain reader, comes to consider it he is reminded of the varied, but not contradictory, estimates of Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith, Mackintosh, Brougham, Hazlitt, Dugald Stewart, Erskine, Jeffrey, Whately, Macaulay, Morley, and many others.

Passing by the critics and venturing, as an ordinary reader, to say how Burke's style affects me : My first impression of it is that of dignity tempered by familiarity ; a stately march of phrases and sentences lightened by a certain harmonious ease, and combining the accuracy of the written with the freedom of the spoken word. One notes in it a wholesome disdain of that mere smartness which some writers mistake for originality, and, in its best examples, an absence of those affectations and conceits which not even the loftiest eloquence can make tolerable. Its robust directness and grave simplicity are its distinguishing features in one place, while in another it ascends to the realms of fancy without for a moment slackening its firm grip of the subject-matter. At its highest elevation, this noble prose exhibits a wealth of imagery, which the great poets might envy, and a power of illustration, dazzling in its brilliance, and in its fertility inexhaustible. Its effect is manifold ; it refines the taste ; it exalts the imagination ; it edifies and stimulates the moral nature, and it enlarges, invigorates, and ennobles the understanding.

The political writings rank with those of Aristotle among the ancients, and among the moderns with those of Montesquieu. To estimate their scientific superiority one has only to compare them with such merely clever productions as Bolingbroke's *Patriot King*; and they can be mentioned in the same breath with Machiavelli's *Prince* only for the purpose of contrasting their perfect morality with the sinister statecraft of the Italian author. It would not be correct to say that Burke's conception of politics was a struggle of opposing principles. That would be carrying the question into the region of the abstract, and of those metaphysical distinctions the very sound of which, he tells us, he hated. But it was undoubtedly a struggle of right and wrong, in the broadest acceptance of those terms—a struggle between what was right in essence and in form, in occasion, in circumstances, and in opportunity, and what was wrong, either because it was manifestly unjust or oppressive, or because it had neither past experience nor present conditions, nor the assured hope of improvement, to recommend it. Hence it is that Burke's work is free from personalities; and that although he well understood the value of party organization, and gave us the best defence of party that ever was written he would not make fidelity\* to party the test of patriotism. There is always a number of people of considerable influence who regard politics as a struggle of personalities, and in no sense a struggle of rival principles. These persons may be easily singled out in any community, for their politics consist simply in abuse of political opponents. I could give a long list of distinguished men of the past, and some of the present day, who stand in this category. The list would contain party leaders by the score; not a few Prime Ministers, and, notwithstanding the virtue inherent in the popular vote, some elected Presidents of Republics! Now, Edmund Burke was not of this type. He was not only a great politician; he was a great man—a man for whom power had no attractions unless he was free to use it for the advancement of some cause in which he believed. Read the short, but eminently appropriate, inscription on his statue at Bristol and you have his character in a glance. It is composed in his own words: "I want to be a member of Parliament in order to take my share in doing good and resisting evil." Doubtless there were contemporaries of Burke's

\*Concluding pages of *Thoughts on the Present Discontent*.



who thought he had missed greatness by missing high office, and who plumed themselves on their good fortune in possessing the favor of the court, or of the Parliamentary majority, which was denied to him. Who thinks of them now when great principles of government have to be expounded, and the rights of nations to be saved? Their dim lights have gone down to rise no more, while the star of Burke shines with a pure and steady light above the horizon. It is due to Sheridan's candor and perception to remember that, although his exceptional gifts as an orator secured him a more attentive hearing in the House of Commons than Burke was able to command, he predicted that Burke's speeches would be quoted when his own were neglected or forgotten.

Among statesmen of our own day who have acknowledged their indebtedness to Burke are to be numbered Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone. The acknowledgment made by the latter occurs in a speech delivered by him during the debates on the extension of the suffrage some thirty years ago. But, with or without acknowledgment, Burke's influence has been a constant, and is, I am convinced, an increasing force in British politics. His method and his very phraseology have entered into the proceedings and the speech of the statesmen of the present day. I do not suggest that this is to be attributed solely to the soundness of his political theory. It is, perhaps, due in part to the fact that he has left behind him, as Moore says in his *Life of Sheridan*, an armory of opinion from which both Whig and Tory may furnish themselves with weapons the most splendid that ever genius and eloquence have condescended to bequeath to party. The historical value of his work is, like its literary merit, indisputable. From no other speeches or writings can we so easily reconstruct the social and political life of the second half of the eighteenth century. The philosopher from whom his posterity daily seek instruction did not shirk the practical duties or fail to meet with an intrepid spirit the events of his own time.

J. O'CONNOR POWER.